



**Testimony
Betsy Gara
Connecticut Council of Small Towns
Before the Education Committee
March 7, 2016**

The Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST), which represents more than one-hundred and ten towns throughout Connecticut, appreciates the opportunity to testify on **HB-5556, AN ACT CONCERNING THE REGIONAL UNIFORM SCHOOL CALENDAR.**

COST supports efforts to encourage municipalities to utilize regional options and shared service agreements to reduce costs and improve efficiencies. Many of our members participate on the More Opportunities for Regional Efficiencies (MORE) Commission and understand the benefits of a regional uniform school calendar.

COST is concerned, however, that HB-5556 includes a penalty provision of 10% of a school district's transportation grant if the district does not use the uniform regional school calendar. It is premature to include a penalty provision for failure to comply with the regional uniform school calendar when school districts have not yet had the opportunity to determine whether it is workable for their district. School districts facing different circumstances may have difficulties complying with a regional uniform school calendar for a variety of reasons, such as construction, staffing issues, or collective bargaining issues.

In addition, many superintendents have indicated that the regional uniform school calendar is unlikely to produce any savings. While it may be helpful in coordinating vacation plans or professional development courses, there is no certainty of any real savings at this time. The expectation that regional school bus contracts will produce savings has not been fully determined and concerns remain regarding how such contracts will impact the amount of time students are on buses, particularly in rural areas.

COST urges lawmakers to delete the penalty provisions in the bill and, instead, engage municipalities, school districts and boards of education in discussions to determine whether the uniform regional school calendar can be utilized to produce actual savings.